

Offering Encouragement

To *en-courage* another person is literally **'to put heart into' them**, to give them the vision, belief and energy to start or keep moving forward, in the same way that to *'in-spire'* another is 'to put breath into' them. Courage is **built on the confidence of the shared stories of our past, and leads us towards an unknown future within a bigger picture.** Leaders establish rhythms of prayer – of **evaluation and gratitude, reflection and grace, enabling others to come back the next day with the imagination of something new.** Encouraging leaders are not rose-tinted in how they see the future, nor are they simply 'glass half full' people. Rather they take challenge seriously, and they define reality accurately, even when it presents uncomfortable truth.

The **biblical narrative is no stranger to suffering**, and recognises times of feeling surrounded, yet comforted and assured of the bigger picture – the encouraging perspective of faith. Isaiah writes 'when not if': ***"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned."*** (Isaiah 43.2), while the Psalmist cries out surrounded: *"I lift my eyes to the mountains, where does my help come from?"* (Psalm 121.1). Jesus himself acknowledges the reality of the challenge, but gives encouragement and the offer of life in all its fullness: *"In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (John 16.33), while Paul opening his second letter to the early church in Corinth draws repeatedly on the legal notion of a paraclete (or advocate), speaking of a *"God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we receive from God."* (2 Cor 1.3-4).

Encouragement is fundamentally relational, following the call to *"spur one another on toward love and good deeds"* (Hebrews 10.24); this kind of leadership **notices others, spots the good and catches people doing well.** The advocate is **someone consistent in your corner, giving validation, purpose and identity, and providing a safe environment for risk-taking and growth.** Their nurturing words are chosen wisely, and are offered regularly, replenishing and enabling, restoring and renewing.

Encouragement takes some of the strain of leadership, giving perspective to the pressure of success or fear of failure, and replacing this with the call to faithfulness. The Psalmist speaks of a God who is both our **shade and our shadow (Psalm 17.8, 63.7, 121.5), countering our dominant educational meta-narrative of 'not good enough'**, while Jesus offers peace and rest for the busy and fearful: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest...I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls"* (Matt 11.28) This relational rest is grounded in teams known for a culture of encouragement.